



GDPRD Civil Society Organizations and Aid Effectiveness in Agriculture and Rural Development Applications Initiative

Good Practices in Agriculture and Rural Development: Synthesis of the Consultations

BACKGROUND

Complementary to the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness (AG) process, and under the auspices of the Global Development Platform for Rural Development (Platform) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the goal of this international consultation is to provide an opportunity for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), partner governments and donors to meet and engage in discussions related to aid effectiveness (AE) and agriculture and rural development (ARD) issues. This strategic initiative included 13 collaborative consultations designed to understand the keys to inclusion of CSOs working on ARD issues within the new aid architecture and AE.

Most of the people in developing nations live in rural areas, and this is where the majority of the world's poor and food insecure reside. Agriculture, the economic mainstay of most rural dwellers, must be understood as a private sector undertaking, mostly done by women. The ARD context is highly specific but shares commonalities amongst countries: populations highly dependent on primary production in terms of income and employment; high levels of impoverishment; low and decreasing government expenditures for ARD and in ODA allocation; the sector's sizable contribution to national GDP and sizable share of natural resource use (e.g. land and water); often the largest but least-developed sector of the economy; the sector's importance for the environment, amplified vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change as well as socio-economic changes; and the small size of the majority of CSOs active in ARD (in Mozambique, over 90% of these are associations formed by small-scale farmers, pastoralist, artisans and fishermen).

Within this ARD context, from November 2007 to January 2008, national consultations were held in 13 countries¹ and involved more than 600 representatives from over 250 local, national and international CSOs, nearly 50 developing country ministries, and more than 30 donor organizations. The Platform also partnered with two organizations which managed three of the national consultations. They are: the *Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (Network of Farmers' and Producers' Organizations of West Africa, ROPPA) for Ghana and Mali, and the Aga Khan Foundation, for the consultations in Afghanistan, a fragile state.

By providing a short synopsis of the results across the 13 consultations, this synthesis attempts to appraise good practices developed and used by CSOs in the ARD sector along with assessing their respective recommendations on AE. Results are drawn from documented good practice, shared country experiences,

¹ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Egypt, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Peru and Vietnam.

and views and voices expressed on the three AG outcomes (see below) across all consultations. Both the consultation findings and dozens of case studies presented have identified principles and practical examples that can be adapted to different circumstances and evolve over time as new lessons are learned.

Beginning with the global synthesis, it is expected that this analysis will foster multi-stakeholder dialogue around a process towards the Accra Agenda for Action. The synthesis will do so by informing the AG and the third High-level Forum (HLF3) to review progress on the five AE principles grounded in the Paris Declaration and addressing its relevance to ARD goals.

FINDINGS REGARDING THE THREE AG OUTCOMES IN ARD

AG OUTCOME 1 - Recognition and voice

There are many AE challenges facing CSOs working in ARD. The need for democratic ownership of aid to ARD was frequently raised across the consultations as national development plans, policies and processes must contain CSO voices. Participants expressed concern that consultations with CSOs to frame development agendas were limited, and often only included a few large CSOs, while most of the local CSOs, particularly CSOs active in ARD and particularly rural CSOs, were never or rarely consulted.

Rural CSOs are significantly disadvantaged in many aspects, including limited capacity, small size, the need to overcome remoteness, poor rural governance, and exclusion from national processes. The nature of the ARD sector exacerbates the challenges CSOs face. Often, these challenges provide an opportunity for greater CSO engagement and recognition, particularly poor governance in rural areas, which creates the space and drives the need for CSOs to provide a voice for CSOs.

AG OUTCOME 2- Applying and enriching the aid effectiveness agenda

Again, few CSOs active in ARD, and particularly rural CSOs, were aware of the AE principles contained in the PD or its follow-up consultation process.

CSO capacity is limited as AE mechanisms are often weak in rural spaces. Overall, CSOs did recognize that they must reinforce their capacity to contribute more effectively to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development; collaborate with other development stakeholders; strengthen local expertise and improve access to production inputs.

In fact, the consultations allowed CSOs to acquire a better understanding of the PD and AE, constituting an important result in partially achieving the second AG Outcome. For example, following the national consultation in Bangladesh, a CSO reference group was created and it will continue to address AE in the ARD sector.

AG OUTCOME 3 - Improved Understanding of Good Practice

CSOs and their primary constituents: Rural CSOs, particularly smaller CSOs, are very close to their members. In fact, the most striking experiences shared among participants were those representing distant rural communities as their members expressed their needs and priorities. CSO members were also identified as playing a useful role in managing for results, as capacity development measures enable partners to cooperate more effectively. Thus working with local communities and encouraging local ownership constitute good practices.

Too often, interventions are designed without sufficient consultation with local community members or processes are not sufficiently inclusive (gender, minorities etc.). However, utilization of local skills in terms of problem identification, and monitoring and reviewing of programs, is contributing significantly towards enhancing AE and acceptance of CSO presence at the local level.

Relationships between and among CSOs at country level and beyond: Rural CSOs are often engaged in agricultural extension, food security and advocacy, reflecting common needs and shared concerns, mobilizing existing CSO networks and providing opportunities for enhanced collaboration.

To ensure aid resources are optimized, CSOs collaborate through joint lobbying, partnerships and networks. Difficulties in establishing such collaboration include competition, management of opportunities, and leadership issues. Insufficient coordination, lack of harmonized approaches, inadequate fulfillment of commitments and lack of transparency have also been identified as current challenges.

However, undue politicization in the aid sector and among CSOs has at times hindered proper enabling environments. Frequently, CSOs only work in collaboration with like-minded organizations having similar visions. CSOs also mobilize communities of common interest in smaller functional peer groups which make decisions for planning and implementing local-level activities.

In Peru, for instance, through mutual respect, good practices demonstrated that partnerships between CSOs, the media, local grassroots organizations and government can enhance development opportunities.

Relationships between Northern and Southern CSOs: Participants noted the need for distinction between national and international CSOs. While the bigger international CSOs reported on collaborative approaches with each other, participation of this nature with local CSOs was often limited because of restricted resources, capacity and opportunity, preventing local CSOs from engaging in coordination efforts. International CSOs are seen as having a higher degree of awareness of AE, and are more proactive, having more capacity to mobilize resources. However, smaller CSOs have identified a few disadvantages for Northern CSOs in executing programs by themselves: time-constrained actions, lack of ownership by beneficiaries, and ill-adapted programs. Competition, creation of dependence, monitoring problems and salary distortions have also been underlined. Mutual respect was particularly identified as the main element needed to improve collaboration.

Relationships between CSOs and developing-country governments: Findings from the consultations emphasized the weak mutual understanding and respect for the roles that both government and CSOs play. Participants mentioned that the government is inconsistent in its relationship with them: when a CSO is engaged in service delivery activities, the government is interested and pleased; when CSOs pursue their advocacy activities, the governments cooperate less. They also noted that CSOs do not often participate in the government monitoring process, or invite the government to take part in their own CSO-led processes in the ARD sector. Lastly, participants also noted the frequent lack of coordination within governments when it comes to rural development, as various line ministries are involved. Few developing countries have well coordinated RD mechanisms in place, making the engaging with government challenging.

Relationships between CSOs and donors: In some consultations, local CSOs tended to jointly perceive the institutional donors and international NGOs as donors, rather than partners. Conversely, while CSOs often play a role as a watchdog, they are also recipients of donor funding. In addition, governments and donors have a tendency to instrumentalize CSOs to implement their strategies, as was demonstrated in Afghanistan. And in some cases, CSOs are also more accountable to donors who provide the funding, than to the recipients of the service they provide, which significantly limits the extent to which CSOs can be outspoken in their representation.

Participants also often remarked that donors failed to sufficiently engage meaningfully with CSOs in rural areas, and as a result, interventions are not as effective as they could be. Donors need to explore new

modalities for engaging CSOs and allowing them access to resources, such as through local funds², as is the case in Burkina Faso.

A FOCUS ON EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE

A common issue across consultations was the difficulty of distinguishing between effective aid and AE. With this in mind, the examples below of good practices were shared during the consultation process. These examples include CSOs involved in:

- Policy dialogue – With no government policy on animal protection, an Andean CSO lobbied government to pursue legal protection of both the animals and their industry. This project established local ownership of alternative development policies, and played an active role in policy formulation.
- Research on the influence of national policies - On the impact of free trade agreements on food security; dialogue led to the promotion of a collective awareness of CSOs as development actors and effectively integrated the views of CSOs in supporting rural development.
- Exploiting market failures – With the private sector absent in Mozambique, CSOs exploited their strong presence in rural communities to address some of the obstacles and constraints the private sector was facing by enabling small farmers to mobilize themselves to gain better access to resources, and secure a stronger bargaining position in the market.
- Strategic network building - Banchte Shekha in Bangladesh developed a collaborative model of donor-government-CSO-community partnership when making sanctuaries for indigenous fish in the beels (perennial water-bodies) of the Jessore region. This has greatly increased both fish diversity and production. Participatory planning and accountability were key to the success of this collaboration.
- Innovative approaches – Work on water and agriculture in Quena governorate, Egypt, began with 15 CSOs and soon attracted donor funding. Together with local donations from farmers and the business community, they were able to successfully complete the canal project and expand the success of the model, having won the best CSO achievement award in the Middle East in 2007.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING THE AID EFFECTIVENESS AGENDA

This synthesis of the consultation process also assesses the following recommendations on AE, drawn from views and voices expressed on the five relationship sets and three AG outcomes.

It is recommended that local and national CSOs:

- Be consulted, particularly rural CSOs, as key development players, as they possess varied and valid experiences which are central to AE in ARD. This is an important aspect of the CSO collective ‘voice’ in ARD to ensure that emerging development policies are responsive of and respond to local conditions and needs.
- Expand the capacity of different rural actors to cooperate and coordinate activities more efficiently, as they possess, and can relay, important information about current rural conditions and needs and build alliances with organizations focussing on related issues like gender or environment.
- Continue improving relationships of mutual respect among stakeholders.
- Enhance awareness of the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the community about their rights.
- Further enhance ownership of the development process, which is particularly challenging in rural areas.

² Local funds are a means by which demand-driven small resources for ARD are targeted directly towards local communities, stimulating partnerships between CSOs and donors, leading to greater cooperation among multiple local stakeholders.

- Foster organization of CSOs into networks or fora based on solidarity, mutual respect, common values, cooperation and coordination in programs and activities to promote institutional and community development.
- Improve consultative frameworks, implementation of joint activities, communications and harmonization of approaches.

It is recommended that Northern CSOs:

- Further strengthen an attitude of mutual respect and equality, and design and implement projects accordingly, ensuring full participation of the local community and CSOs in all stages of the development process.
- Be transparent and accountable to local communities and participating CSOs for the projects they assist or implement.
- Host periodic fora to identify ways of improving collaboration between national and international CSOs.

It is recommended that governments:

- Provide an enabling environment, including decentralization, for CSOs to play their role as development actors, e.g. through legislation or regulatory frameworks, tax regulation, access to information, and protection and exercise of civil and political rights.
- Promote enabling conditions to empower CSOs and constituents in their contribution to improving AE.
- Make relevant information available to rural CSOs in an appropriate form.
- Work with local elected representatives for development projects to ensure effective action and improved results.
- Assess, jointly with concerned parties, if an independent CSO commission to facilitate AE activities is needed.
- Support national ARD networks.
- Articulate AE priorities with respect to local ARD cultures, customs, conditions and needs.

It is recommended that donors:

- Contribute to improving AE in ARD by involving CSOs in the design and monitoring of development policies and strategies.
- Accompany and support CSOs, and particularly rural CSOs, to ensure that they acquire the power and voice they deserve.
- Provide flexible funding for CSO capacity building, to meet community needs, longer funding timeframes, information on donor programs reaching CSOs, in particular small CSOs, active in ARD, in an appropriate form.
- Reinforce their role as promoters of participatory processes in AE.
- Consult with local CSO networks and support the development work of smaller local CSOs, active in ARD.

SUMMARY

These early results from the consultations suggest the areas of greatest interest are:

- for AG Outcome 1, the desire for increased recognition and a greater voice, in particular by CSOs active in ARD (they are significantly disadvantaged in many aspects, including limited capacity, small size, the need to overcome remoteness, poor rural governance, and exclusion from national processes, principally due to the exacerbating nature of the sector's challenges);
- for AG Outcome 2, addressing the limited capacity of rural CSOs to engage with governments and donors in particular, as AE mechanisms are often weak in rural spaces; and
- for AG Outcome 3, the proximity and close relationships of rural CSOs with their constituents in the ARD sector; the increased and closer cooperation on AE with governments, donors, and

international or foreign CSOs; the weak mutual understanding and respect for the roles assigned to both stakeholders and CSOs; and the exploration of new modalities for engaging CSOs.

Findings on CSO challenges active in ARD included the intentional neglect by government of CSOs in some countries; the lack of awareness of the Paris Declaration and basic principles of AE; and insufficient access to government information and officials. CSOs emphasized additional challenges such as faltering financial resources, viability, and sustainability, and being viewed merely as implementing agencies. However, the consultations have documented how CSOs active in ARD can play major roles as development agents and implementing agencies, promoting member participation, implementing development programs, empowering specific social groups, defending the rights of citizens, and monitoring the use of public resources. In some cases, the consultation was an opportunity to identify models of good practice that strategically combine the advantages of decentralized or community-based CSOs with those with a larger programming perspective such as donors and governments.

The Platform and CIDA hope that the insights and recommendations stemming from this work will find their way into advice to the AG and deliberations at the HLF3, and will foster multi-stakeholder dialogue in the process towards the Accra Agenda on Action on the role and importance of CSOs in the delivery of effective aid in ARD.

Preliminary findings/draft as of February 4, 2008

Also see: www.donorplatform.org

By Dr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée, Dr. Mushtaq Ahmed and Christoph Langenkamp

For additional inquiries, please contact Mushtaq_Ahmed@acdi-cida.gc.ca